

Table. Maximum counts of magpies and crows seen from Hyndland Court 1982-1999

Period	Magpies (<i>Pica pica</i>)		Crows (<i>Corvus corone</i>)	
	Total of maxima	mean	Total of maxima	mean
1982-84	7*	2.3	6	2
1985-89	27	5.4	29	5.6
1990-94	59	11.8	24	4.8
1995-99	54	10.8	38	7.6

* Sum of highest counts in 1992 (=3), 1983 (=2), 1984 (=2)

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In common with others of the crow family, the magpie evokes mixed feelings: the story that it refused to go into the Ark with Noah and the other animals damned it in many peoples' eyes for it preferred instead to sit on top of the Ark and chatter and swear as the world drowned. The magpie dominates Kelvingrove, as at Spring 1999-2000 there are at least 15 birds. Their chattering is part of park life and they are a nuisance to everything else. Notable behaviour includes following squirrels around and digging up nuts that they have buried, immediately the squirrel's back is turned. Fighting between themselves and other birds is common: this was clearly illustrated in cruel incidents between the 6th – 7th April 1999. Fierce and sustained attacks were made by magpies on a single member of their species, culminating in an all out attack on the 7th. I was attracted to the duck pond area of Kelvingrove by screaming that early morning and found the single bird in a very bad way with the eye-lids half closed, downed on the park pathway. It was by then no longer able to fly and attempts to escape were thwarted by a group of magpies. Attack was constant and even when I stood by the injured bird, two magpies in particular still tried to get at it. The victim's submissive behaviour in no way saved it and I remained with the bird for as long as I could but it then tried to run along the path to cover and once again the assault began. The sequence of attacks ran from the pond down to the River Kelvin. It is not right to interfere in "nature's way" but this incident was as bad as I have ever seen. I was told by a young woman at the time, that she too had tried to help the badly mauled magpie at the start of the attacks on the 6th. It did not in the end prove possible to give the bird any real chance of survival and magpie remains were spotted in the Kelvin on the 9th at which time too the magpies involved in the assault were bitterly scolding me.

Magpie savagery continued a feature of parkland life

with their taking on the many local gulls. The magpies also attack cats predated in the park: 21st March 2000 some 14 magpies cornered a cat in a tree near the fountain, the cat eventually fleeing to thick cover.

Magpies are now the principal birds of the parkland, much to the disadvantage it would seem of everything else: they are surprisingly vicious.

Great spotted woodpecker nest in Kelvingrove in 1999

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Woodpeckers first explored an ailing willow tree near the pedestrian bridge in Kelvingrove as a potential nest site in 1998. It was not used that year, but in May 1999, it was cleared out by the woodpeckers and a nest was soon active. Visited daily from the 1st to the 18th June it proved possible to observe the birds' nesting habits. The woodpeckers fed the nestlings during periods of observation at an average of 4 minute intervals: foraging trips varied slightly in time and it can be assumed reflected distance travelled to find food. Early morning observations revealed extensive nest cleaning and faecal matter was taken out from the nest and dropped by the woodpeckers in surrounding parkland and notably in the River Kelvin. Birds carried sizeable amounts of waste, including twiggy material from the hole.

The birds reacted very badly to the presence of larger birds, such as magpie, and either scolded or took such evasive action as to distract other birds from the nest hole. The birds' caution did not however stop a great tit actually entering their nest hole on the 4th June but it was quickly away again.

A woodpecker chick appeared at the nest hole from

8th June and its calling could be heard over 40 metres distance, even with traffic on Kelvinway. It seems that there was at one point more than one chick but it is likely that the young bird which eventually left the hole trampled its brethren to oblivion. So intent were the adult woodpeckers on attending their young that not even police activity and arrest of anti-social elements immediate to the nest site on 10th June disturbed nesting work.

From the 14th to the 15th June activity about the nest became frantic, the surviving young bird was stretching well out the hole and calling continuously. The adults went through elaborate calling and drumming behaviour, coupled to ignoring the calls of their youngster completely, from the 15th to the 17th June, when the nest was found deserted. One young bird got clear and was seen in the parkland on the 18th; only very limited attention was given by the adults and the youngster was mobbed on several occasions when alone by other birds, notably blackbird.

On the 22nd June the nest tree which had been upright at 08.00 hours was down by 12.45 having fallen to the riverside. Attempts were made to arrange for the cutting of the nesting hole area out from the trunk to record the nest properly, this failed due to unhelpful bureaucracy, thus losing nest fauna and any real evidence of family numbers. The chance to observe the woodpecker nest over a long period of time and to watch the birds' behaviour was a unique opportunity, most especially in that it seems to have been the first woodpecker nest in Kelvingrove in modern times. That the woodpecker activity about Kelvingrove was eventually compromised by a brutal spate of tree felling was a sad anti-climax to two years local woodpecker activity. The birds remain active along the Kelvin Valley into 2000 but their chances of nesting success is at the time of writing, May 2000, open to question.

Swans on the Forth and Clyde Canal

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Mute swans have a long and popular association with the Forth and Clyde Canal. A pair called 'Jock and Jeanie' were well known and loved during the 1930s in the Kilsyth area, where they regularly took food from the passengers of the pleasure steamer 'Gipsy Queen'.

Today the canal still provides good habitat for swans both for breeding and for overwintering.

Table 1 shows breeding activity I have observed from 1998-2000 along the 16km (10 mile) stretch of canal from Kirkintilloch to the Lanarkshire County Boundary near the A80. Six pairs hatched 32 cygnets along this stretch in 1999. Each pair occupied a territory of approximately 1.5 to 3km (1 to 2 miles).

The 'early birds' that hatched broods in May had bigger broods and kept more cygnets alive until the end of the year. The later pairs that hatched their broods in late June or early July were far less successful. They had smaller broods and only one cygnet was seen by December.

According to Gibson (1999), seven pairs raised fifteen young on the 14km (9mile) western end of the canal between Bowling and the Kelvin and a further pair raised five young between Bishopbriggs and Kirkintilloch in 1998. Including uncounted sections of the canal, it is therefore likely that around 16 breeding pairs exist on the canal within the Clyde area and around 20 breeding pairs on the canal as a whole. This may be compared with 127 breeding pairs for the entire Clyde area as given by Gibson.

Table 2 shows the winter flock size I have observed at Kirkintilloch over the 1999/2000 winter. The birds are very popular and fed frequently by the public. Other winter flocks have been recorded; Henty (1999) reports 39 being seen in the Falkirk area on the 11th March 1998. The winter flocks appear to be mainly incoming birds as the resident birds and their cygnets were often found on their territories during the winter. Taking resident and visiting birds together it seems likely that about 150 to 200 swans are present on the canal during the winter. This may be compared with a winter total of 3750 birds, as given by Thom (1986) for Scotland as a whole.

Table 2 Winter flock size at Kirkintilloch

Date	Flock Size
November 16, 1999	38
December 29 1999	48
January 18, 2000	52
February 5, 2000	34
March 11, 2000	22
April 9, 2000	6

To date (July 2000), the resident pairs are nesting again on the Kirkintilloch to A80 stretch and have produced 32 cygnets. Whilst the Millenium Link construction work may have caused problems for some swans within Glasgow and Falkirk, the descendants of 'Jock and Jeanie' will soon be greeting passengers on the new generation of canal cruisers.